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THE DEPARTMENT OF TRUTH
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TYNION | SIMMONDS | SNYDER | HIXSON | BELLAIRE | BIDIKAR

THE DEPARTMENT OF TRUTH

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Off the Map.

CHAPTER 22:

CROOKED HOUSE

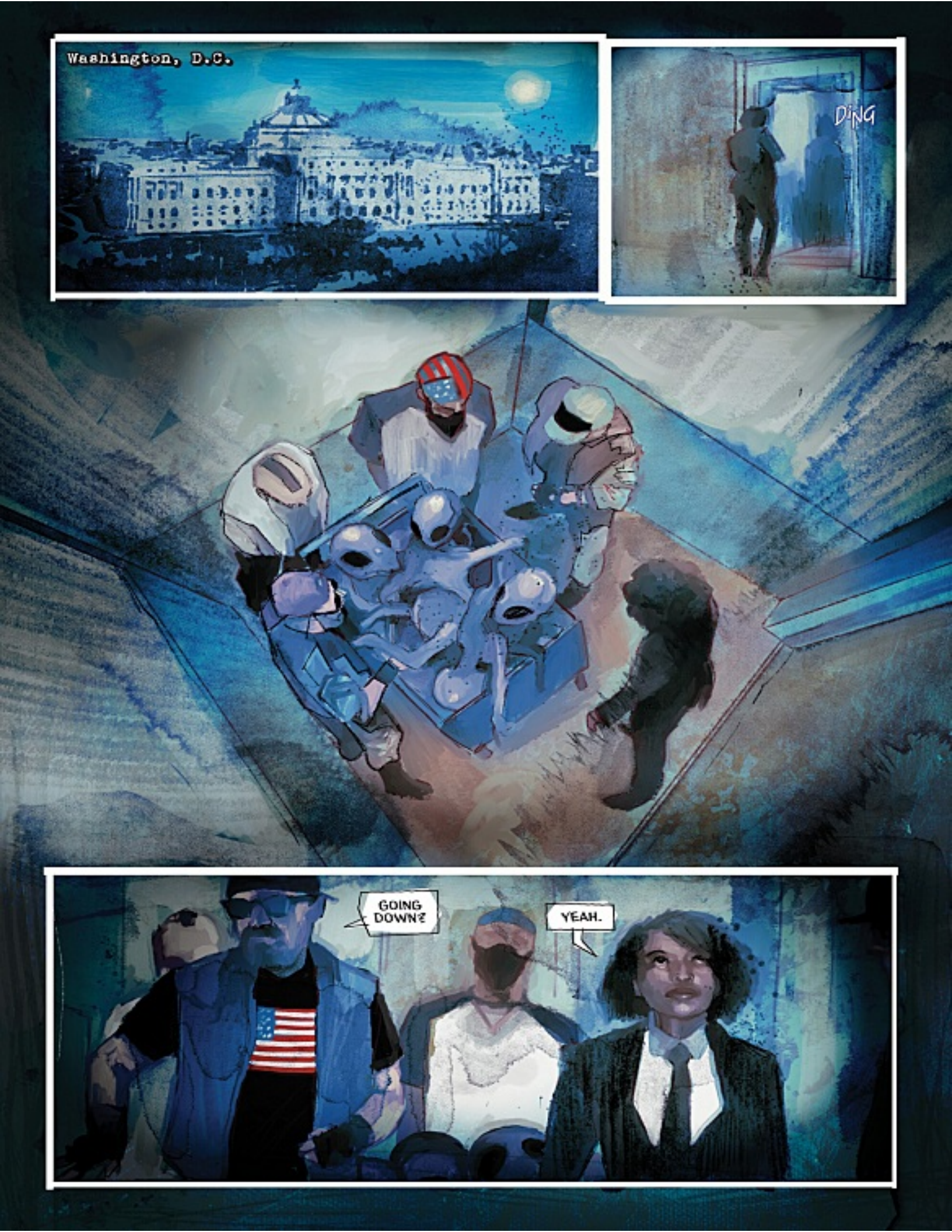
WHAT ARE YOU DOING?
I'M WRITING.
I TOLD YOU ABOUT GETTING ON THE INTERNET, MATTY...
IT'S NOT CONNECTED TO THE INTERNET, COLE. IT'S NOT CONNECTED TO ANYTHING.
I CAN'T EVEN USE MICROSOFT WORD BECAUSE IT CAN'T CONFIRM WHETHER I HAVE A REAL ACCOUNT.
EVERYTHING IS SO SHIT THESE DAYS.
YEAH.

YOU GOT US FOOD?
AND READING MATERIAL.
"TWELVE HUNDRED GOVERNMENT WORKERS LAID OFF."
"WILL ANOTHER IVY CAVE TO WHITE HOUSE DEMANDS?"
SHOULD I KEEP GOING?
I WORK AT A NEWSPAPER AND I STILL FORGET THAT THEY PRINT REAL NEWSPAPERS.
WHAT'S IN THE PAPERS IS SCARY ENOUGH. BUT WHAT'S NOT IN THE PAPERS...

COME HERE.
I'M GOING TO FEED IT.
YOU'RE SURE YOU WANT TO DO THAT?
I DON'T KNOW. IT FEELS LIKE A THING I SHOULD DO.
I GUESS IT MAKES SENSE. YOU'VE ALWAYS LOVED FEEDING YOUR CHILDHOOD NIGHTMARE.
YEAH. I HAVE.

I BROUGHT YOU SOMETHING. TO EAT.
AND HE WENT A CROOKED MILE
THERE WAS A CROOKED MAN

IT'S VEAL. I FIGURED THAT'S ALMOST LIKE A BABY. IN A WAY.
HE FOUND A CROOKED SIXPENCE AGAINST A CROOKED STILE
WE NEED TO TALK ABOUT WHAT'S HAPPENED. WHAT WE'RE GOING TO NEED TO DO NEXT.
HE BOUGHT A CROOKED CAT
WHICH CAUGHT A CROOKED MOUSE
AND THEY ALL LIVED TOGETHER IN A LITTLE CROOKED HOUSE!


Washington, D.C.
DING
GOING DOWN?
YEAH.

RUBY. GLAD I CAUGHT YA.
I GUESS, UH...I GUESS THIS IS GOODBYE.
FART
NO. HUNKY. NOT YOU, TOO.

THE SHITSTAIN TODDLER IN THE HAT JUST CLEARED OUT ROCK BOTTOM. SAID THEY'RE THROWING ALL MY TVs IN THE TRASH.
NEW REGIME ISN'T KEEN ON KEEPING TRACK OF WHAT THE FUCKHEADS ARE SPREADING ON CABLE.
SEEM TO BE MORE INTERESTED IN CREATING CONSPIRACY THEORIES THAN STOPPING THEM.
FART GOBLIN
YOU NEED TO BE CAREFUL WHAT YOU'RE SAYING RIGHT NOW. PEOPLE CAN OVERHEAR.
AND THINGS THAT WALK LIKE PEOPLE.
FART GOBLIN
UHH...
THIS PLACE IS GETTING FUCKING WEIRD, RUBY.

YOU CAN GO FUCK YOURSELF WITH YOUR MOTHER'S SHITTY OLD VIBRATOR!
YOU'RE GOING TO PISS YOUR LITTLE NAZI DIAPERS WHEN YOU GET A REAL TASTE OF THIS WORLD, YOU INCEL FREAK.
WHAT A HORRID LITTLE BITCH MOUTH YOU HAVE, FRANCINE.
I'VE GOT MORE THAN A MOUTH.
AND IF YOU USE IT OUTSIDE OF THESE DOORS, WE'RE GOING TO FUCKING DISAPPEAR YOU, DO YOU UNDERSTAND THAT?
I MEAN MEN IN BLACK SUITS PUTTING YOU ON A PLANE TO SOME BUMFUCK COUNTRY ON THE OTHER END OF THE WORLD WHERE YOU WON'T HAVE A NAME.
THIS IS US PLAYING NICE. THIS IS YOU GETTING SEVERANCE. BUT BOY, OH BOY, I HOPE YOU SLIP UP, FRANCINE.

LEE. I DEMAND TO SPEAK TO LEE.
SORRY, DOC BROWN, BUT YOU DON'T GET TO TALK TO LEE ANYMORE. YOU DON'T GET TO KNOW THAT LEE EVEN FUCKING EXISTS.
MY ENTIRE LIFE HAS BEEN DEDICATED TO THIS DEPARTMENT. WHERE AM I SUPPOSED TO GO? WHAT AM I SUPPOSED TO DO?
GO SEE IF YOUR LITTLE GREEN FRIENDS ARE DOWN TO TAKE YOU FOR A TRIP. OR GO CRAWL UNDER A PORCH AND DIE. YOU'RE A FUCKING RELIC. YOU DON'T MATTER.
OH, BUT FIRST.
THIS IS DEPARTMENT PROPERTY. PROPRIETARY TECHNOLOGY, SEE?

NO. NO!!
GET OUT OF MY WAY.
YOU SHOULD LEAVE QUIETER THAN THAT, HUNKY.
WHAT ARE YOU GOING TO DO?
FART GOBLIN
SOMEBODY HAS TO STAY TO KEEP AN EYE ON THINGS.
SORRY, HUNKY. I HAVE A CALL.

WE BURNED THIS CUTE LITTLE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL TO THE GROUND.
HE'S NOT HERE.

I DIDN'T SAY HE WAS THERE. I SAID THAT HE **MIGHT** GO THERE.
IT'S WHERE THE STAR-FACED MAN WAS BORN. WHERE ALL OF THIS STARTED FOR COLE.

RUBY, HONEY. I KNOW YOU'RE FOND OF THE BOY, BUT YOU HAVE TO REALIZE HOW **DANGEROUS** THAT CREATURE BEING OUT THERE IS.

WE NEED TO PUT THAT DEVIL DOWN, AND ANYBODY ON ITS SIDE, TOO.

I KNOW YOU'RE A **RIGHTEOUS** WOMAN EVEN IF YOU'VE SOME MISGUIDED KINSHIP.

I'VE TOLD YOU EVERYTHING I KNOW ABOUT COLE TURNER AND WHERE HE'D GO. IF YOU **LET ME** GO LOOKING FOR HIM, I MIGHT TURN SOMETHING ELSE UP.
I **SO** WISH I COULD TRUST YOU, DARLING.
BUT I'M NOT AS STUPID AS YOU **THINK** I AM.
I AM GOING TO **FIND** COLE TURNER, AND WE'RE GOING TO PUT A **BULLET** IN HIS HEAD, **AND** IN THE HEAD OF HIS LITTLE BOYFRIEND WITH THE RECORDINGS ABOUT THE DEPARTMENT'S SECRET HISTORY, AND IN THE HEAD OF THE **DEVIL** HE BROKE OUT OF THE DEPARTMENT.
GOOD LUCK, THEN.

WHAT DO YOU WANT?

YOU SHOULD SLEEP.
YEAH.
NOT GOING TO, THOUGH.
NO, I WILL. I'M JUST THINKING.
IT'S NOT EVEN ANXIETY. IT'S STRANGE HOW CALM I FEEL. I DON'T KNOW THAT I'VE EVER IN MY LIFE FELT CALM LIKE THIS.

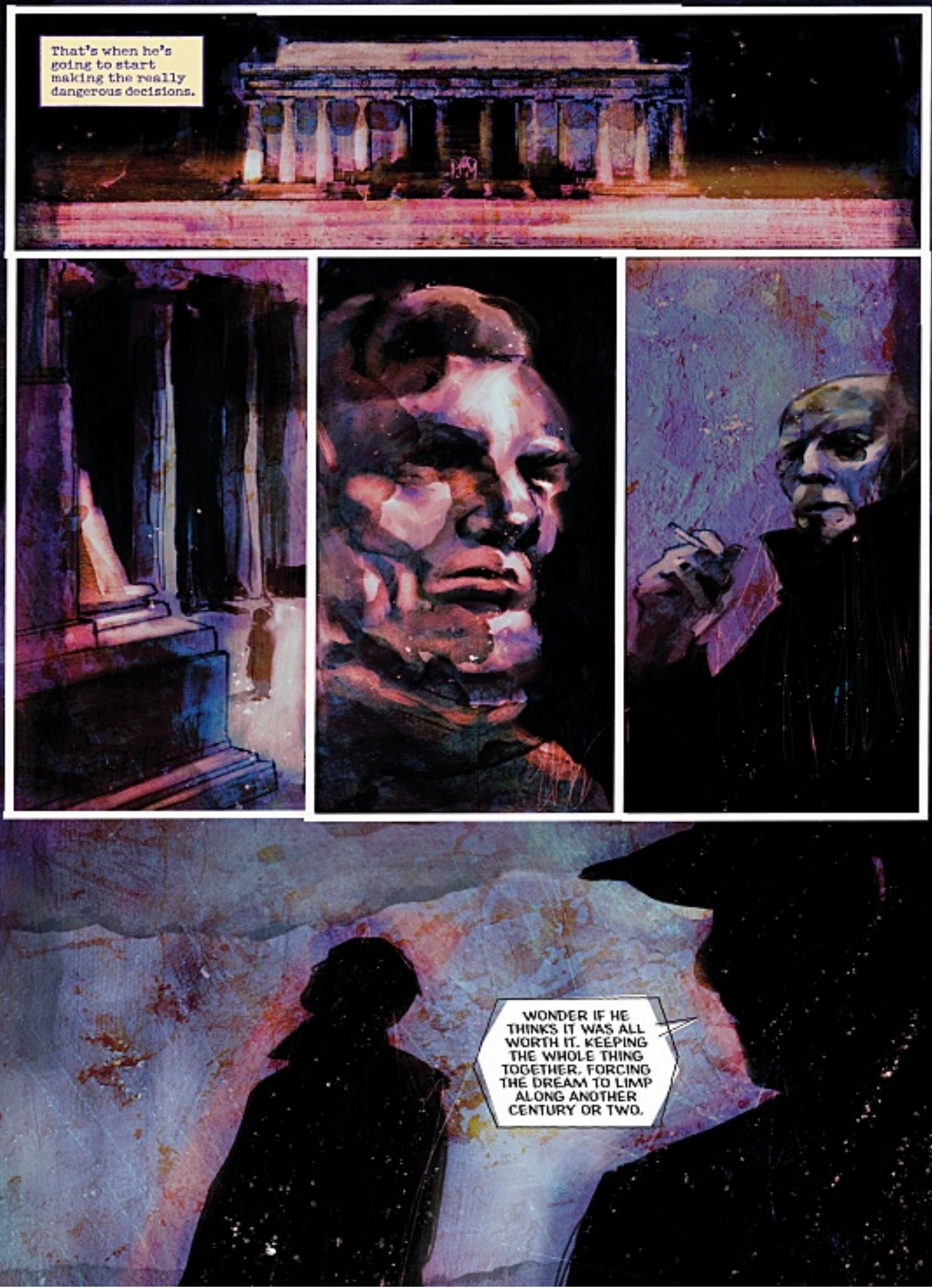
I'M GLAD YOU'RE CALM, COLE. I'M SCARED TO FUCKING DEATH.
I'M SCARED, TOO. I PROMISE I'M SCARED. THE PEOPLE LEE HAVE LET INTO POWER, THEY'RE GOING TO WANT TO MAKE AN EXAMPLE OF US.
BUT THERE'S PART OF IT THAT'S JUST **CLARIFYING,** YOU KNOW? THE GOVERNMENT HATES US AND WANTS US DEAD, AND WE HAVE TO ACT ACCORDINGLY.
WE'RE NOT PRETENDING ANYMORE. WE DON'T HAVE TO PRETEND.
CRASH!
DID IT GET FREE AGAIN?
I CHECKED THE CHAINS THIS AFTERNOON.

WHERE... WHERE IS...?
DOC?
WERE YOU FOLLOWED? ARE WE IN TROUBLE?
DON'T ASK ME QUESTIONS. NOT UNTIL IT'S SAFE.
DOC, WHAT ARE YOU LOOKING FOR?
WHERE DID YOU PUT THE F-FLIPPING FOIL, COLE?!

HEY. IT'S OKAY.
I HAVE SOME HERE.
FOIL
OKAY.
I'M SORRY. I ALMOST... I ALMOST SWORE--
BUT HE DOESN'T GET TO DO THAT. I WON'T SINK TO HIS LEVEL. I WON'T LET THIS MOMENT DARKEN ME.

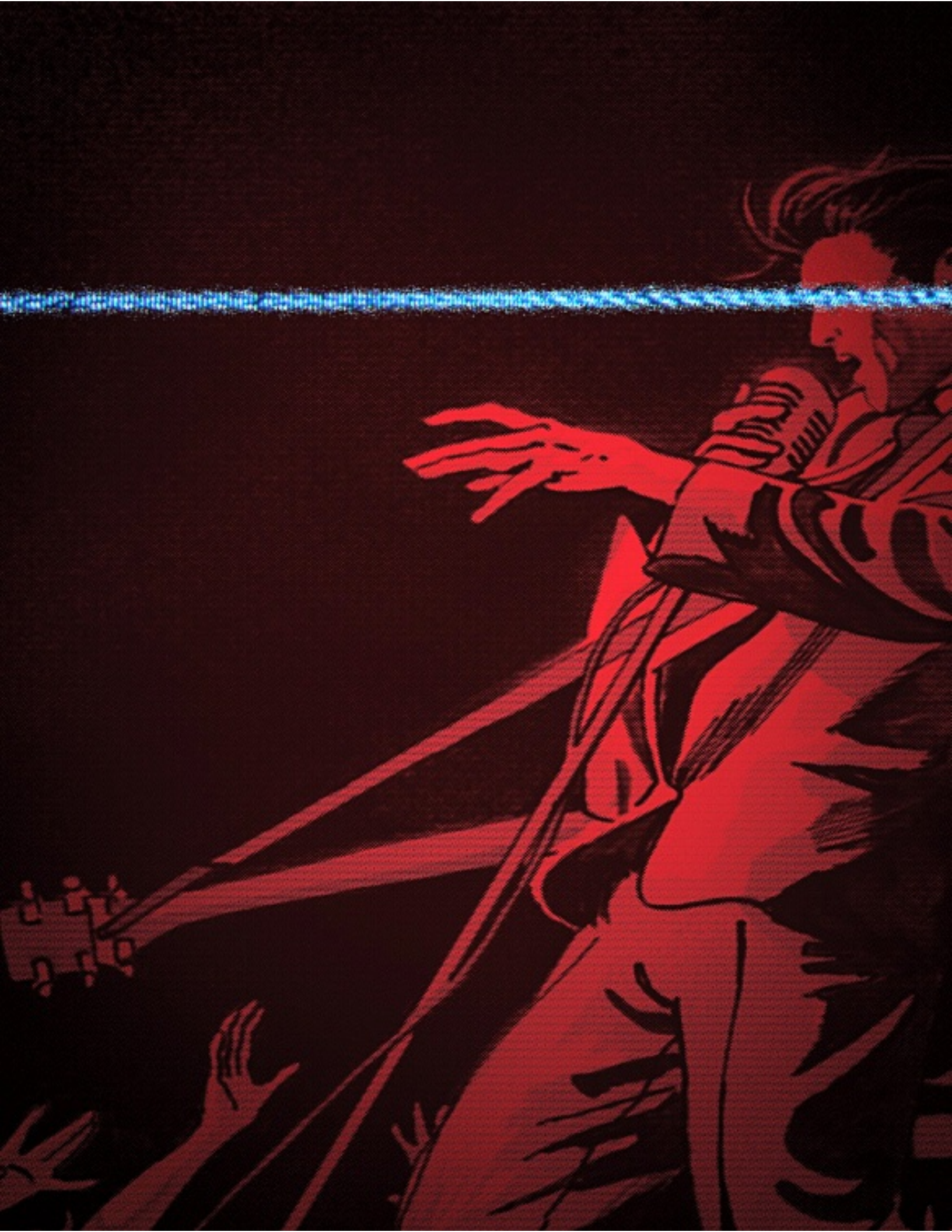
ARE WE SAFE?
THAT IS A SILLY QUESTION, COLE. OF COURSE WE'RE NOT SAFE.
BUT I WASN'T FOLLOWED. THIS IS THE BENEFIT OF A HALF-CENTURY THINKING LIKE A RAVING PARANOIAC. YOU THINK A LITTLE MORE STRANGELY.
I've had a way out for longer than you've been alive. A car I pay for in a lot one building over from the lot I've parked my usual car in.
I've never interacted with that car once in my life, but I've kept the key in my wallet. Today when I left, I went to the backup car, got in it, and drove off.
And it's a proper old machine. Nothing in it that could connect to a satellite. There isn't even a radio.
It was difficult not to stop to protect myself, but I had you and Matthew to think about.

THE CABIN IS THE SAME.
A LITTLE PLOT I CONCEIVED BACK IN THE LATE '70s, I THINK. SHORTLY AFTER LEE TOOK OVER THE DEPARTMENT. I SEND A LITTLE CASH THROUGH INTERMEDIARIES.
THERE'S NOTHING ON PAPER THAT CONNECTS THIS LAND TO ME. NO THREAD THAT LEE OR THE DEPARTMENT COULD FOLLOW. I'M GLAD YOU FOUND IT.
I'M GLAD, TOO.
HUNKY AND FRANK HAVE BEEN MOVING MY FILES OUT OF THE OFFICE FOR WEEKS. THEY'LL TAKE A MORE CIRCUITOUS ROUTE HERE, BUT THEN WE'LL HAVE WHAT WE NEED.
I HONESTLY WASN'T SURE THEY'D BE STUPID ENOUGH TO GET RID OF ME. I BET THAT **CHILD** DIDN'T EVEN RUN IT BY LEE.
I KNOW FAR TOO MUCH TO HAVE LET GO. AND WHEN LEE REALIZES I'M OFF THE MAP...


That's when he's going to start making the really dangerous decisions.
WONDER IF HE THINKS IT WAS ALL WORTH IT. KEEPING THE WHOLE THING TOGETHER. FORCING THE DREAM TO LIMP ALONG ANOTHER CENTURY OR TWO.

I'M GLAD YOU CAME.
WELL, JURY'S OUT ON MY PART. BUT GOLLY, AM I CURIOUS WHAT YOU HAVE TO SAY.
IT'S TIME TO TAKE SOME BIG SWINGS, HAWK, WHILE WE STILL CAN.
TELL **BARKER** IT'S TIME WE SAT DOWN AND TALKED ABOUT THE FUTURE OF THIS COUNTRY.

DEPARTMENT OF TRUTH
UNITED STATES OF AMERICA



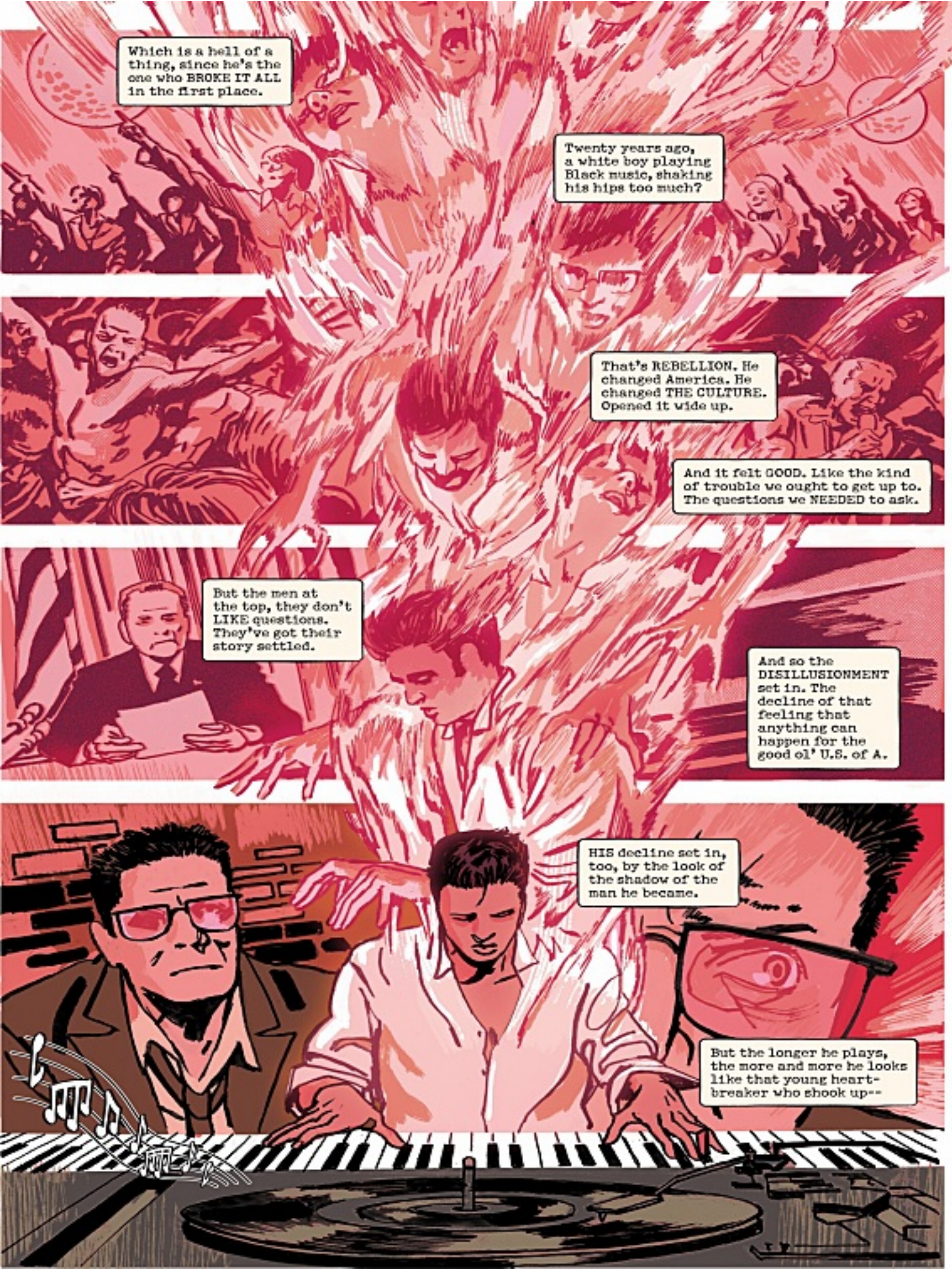
Memphis, Tennessee. 1977.
He said the only thing that helps is THE MUSIC.
Looping the song over and over while he plays along.
Asked me to find a SUN RECORDS VINYL, one of his earliest.
My GAS MASK was fogged up and it felt like my clothes were going to CATCH FIRE, but I managed.

The first time I looked at him, I couldn't tell WHAT I was seeing.

It was like there were a DOZEN versions of him, all fighting to exist at once.

LOUDER IF YOU PLEASE, BROTHER.

But when he's behind the piano, his voice getting steadier, he starts to come into FOCUS.


Which is a hell of a thing, since he's the one who BROKE IT ALL in the first place.
Twenty years ago, a white boy playing Black music, shaking his hips too much?
That's REBELLION. He changed America. He changed THE CULTURE. Opened it wide up.
And it felt GOOD. Like the kind of trouble we ought to get up to. The questions we NEEDED to ask.
But the men at the top, they don't LIKE questions. They've got their story settled.
And so the DISILLUSIONMENT set in. The decline of that feeling that anything can happen for the good ol' U.S. of A.
HIS decline set in, too, by the look of the shadow of the man he became.
But the longer he plays, the more and more he looks like that young heart-breaker who shook up--

KSSH
STEP AWAY FROM THE ASSET.
RUSSIANS. Lee warned me about the goddamn Russians.
KRASH
STAND BACK. I'LL--
NOW! ON THE GROUND!
THAT AIN'T NO WAY TO ENTER A MAN'S HOME.

BOOM
PIFF PIFF
I GOT YA, HUCK!
HEEYAH!
Bullets passed right through him.
UH-UH.
PIFF PIFF
LET'S HAVE US A CONVERSATION.

Jesus Christ. They're going to kill him. If I make it outta here, Lee will have my head on a--
PIFF PIFF
PIFF PIFF PIFF
HOT DAMN!
What the HELL is he?
NOT BAD.
C'MON, LET'S SEE WHY BREZHNEV SENT HIS BOYS AFTER YOU.

YOU WILL GET NOTHING OUT OF ME, AMERICAN SCUM!
WHAT...WHAT IN GOD'S NAME AM I SEEING?
YOU'VE GOT HIS FACE AND A RUSSIAN ACCENT.
START EXPLAINING REAL FAST BEFORE MY FINGER SLIPS.
HAH! YOU ARE CLOWNS.
THIS ONE LOOKS LIKE ME TOO...
GREAT, MAYBE ONE OF THE OTHERS IS STILL ALIVE AND MORE TALKATIVE.
GAAH!
GAHAHA... FINE, IT DOES NOT MATTER ANYWAY...

"...YOU ARE FAR TOO LATE TO TURN BACK THE TIDE NOW.
"HAVE YOU NOT WONDERED WHY YOUR ALL-AMERICAN BOY BECAME SO PECULIAR OVER THE YEARS?
"DO YOU NOT SEE THE POWER IN SHOWING YOUR COUNTRY'S 'KING' GROWING FAT AND ERRATIC, RECKLESS AND IMPULSIVE?
"IT TOOK US YEARS TO SPREAD THESE STORIES FAR AND WIDE, TO EVERY CORNER OF YOUR 'FREE NATION.'
"EVEN HE LIKELY DOES NOT KNOW WHICH ONES ARE TRUE AND WHICH ONES ARE FICTION."
YOU SONAFABITCH! YOU DID THIS TO ME?!

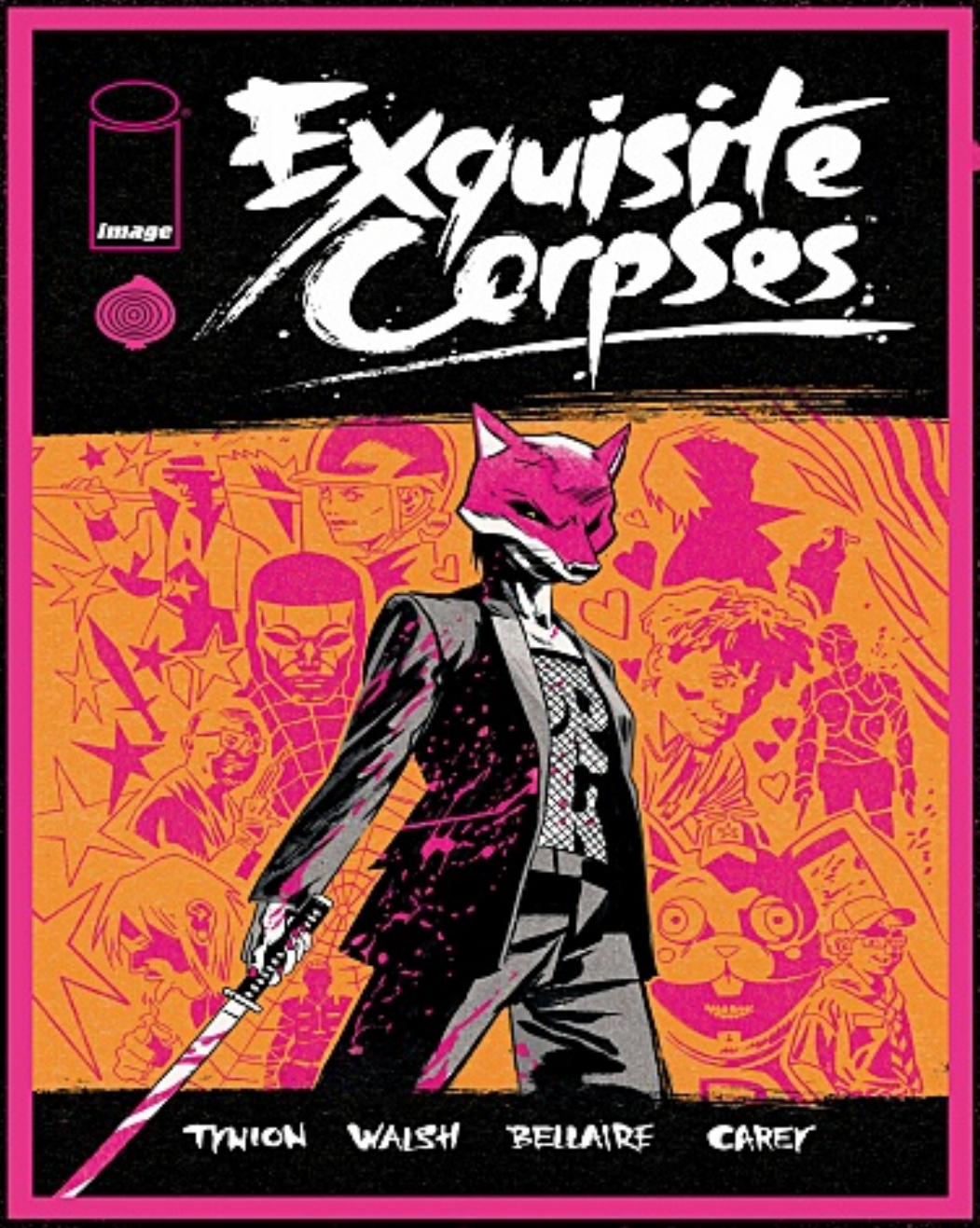
YOUR DEPARTMENT WON'T GET *THE STORY* IT WANTS TO TELL...
CHK
GRRG-...

CYANIDE TABLETS.
DAMMIT.
I HAVEN'T KNOWN YOU LONG, HUCK, BUT YOU'RE THE ONLY ONE DOING RIGHT BY ME.

I AIN'T NO SAINT, BUT I'VE TRIED NEVER TO DO ANYTHING THAT WOULD HURT MY FAMILY OR OFFEND GOD. I FIGURE I DON'T DESERVE ALL THIS.
YOU GOT ANYONE YOU CAN *TRUST* TO HELP FIX WHAT'S HAPPENING TO ME?

TRUST? NO.
BUT YEAH, I'D BETTER CALL LEE.

THE HORROR EVENT OF THE YEAR IS HERE.



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—GEOFF JOHNS (GEIGER, GREEN LANTERN)

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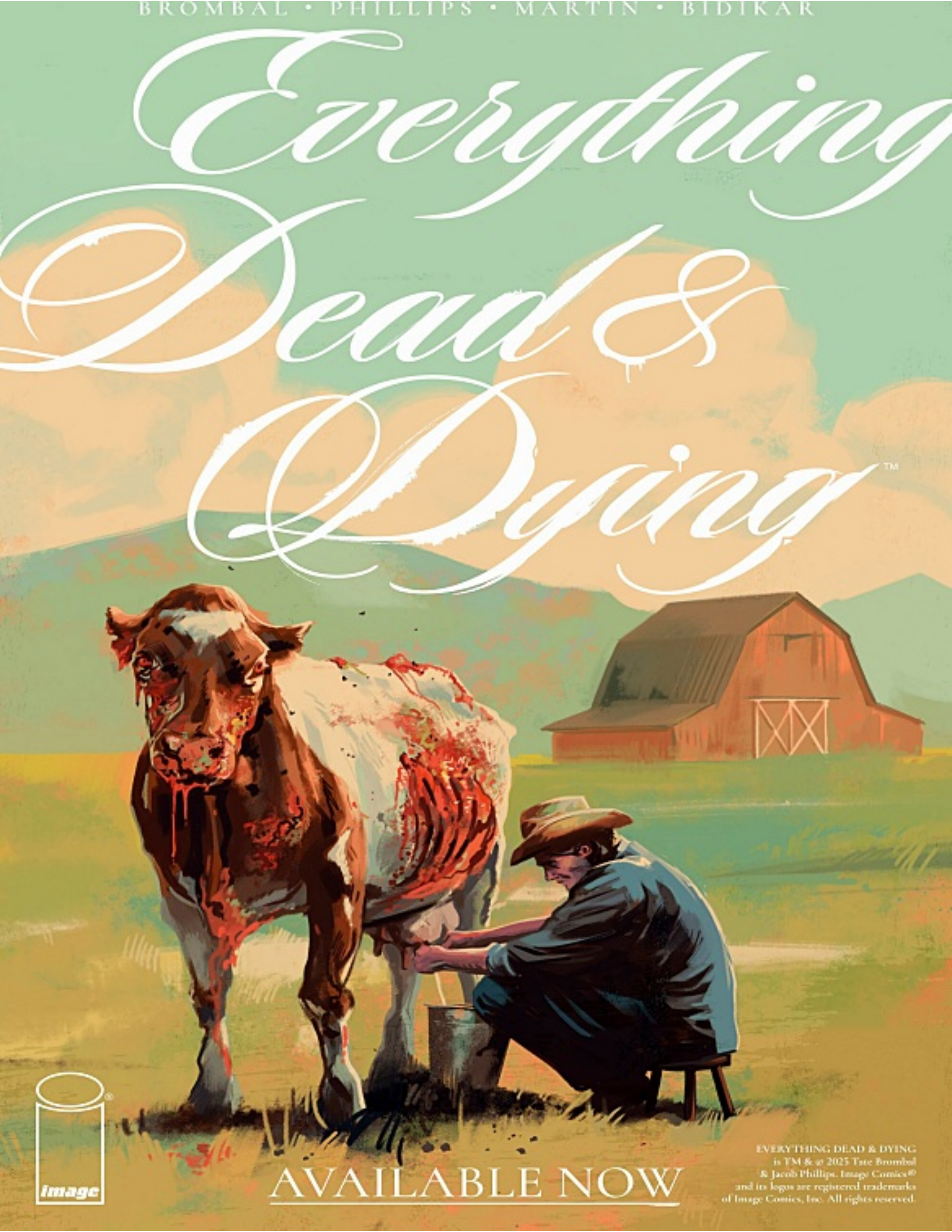

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NEXT
issue
THINGS GET
WORSE

COVER BY MARTIN SIMMONDS

RATED M / MATURE

ISSUE THIRTY-FOUR

Goobadaddy